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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - REMOVE ZEN

SIPDIS
NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/20

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [VE](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: Colombian Guerrillas Reportedly Met with GRBV Officials in Caracas

CLASSIFIED BY: duddy, ambassador, dos, amb; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (S) Investigative journalist Nelson Bocaranda (strictly protect) told the Ambassador on November 16 that a reliable source had told him that Colombian guerrilla leaders had been in Caracas the previous week to meet with senior Venezuelan government officials to plan a possible provocative operation either along the Venezuelan-Colombian border or even within Colombia proper. The operation would be in response to the signing of the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). The guerrilla leaders had reportedly traveled to various locations in Caracas with police protection. At the time, Bocaranda did not have further details about whether the guerrillas who participated in the meeting were from the FARC or ELN or their specific contacts in the GBRV. Bocaranda believes that the GBRV may be looking to use the FARC or ELN as surrogates to provoke an incident with Colombia, but he does not think Chavez wants a war with Colombia.

12. (C) In his weekly newspaper column on November 19, Bocaranda repeated this information and added some details, specifically that both FARC and ELN representatives had participated in the meetings with "the highest level leadership of the Bolivarian government" ("con la mas alta dirigencia del gobierno bolivariana") and had been protected and transported in "armored vans." He also alleged that Fidel Castro had pressured Chavez to "provoke" the U.S. government into reacting since "your words would thereby have greater credibility. Enough already with protecting the figure of Obama."

13. (S) Bocaranda has reported reliably in the past. The Embassy separately confirmed other information Bocaranda provided to the Ambassador on November 16, and which appeared in the November 19 column, regarding the fact that Venezuela only has eight pilots for its 20 F-16s.

14. (C) Comment: Venezuela's November 19 bombing of footbridges along the border (septel), which caused no deaths but made headlines, suggests the kind of provocative actions that the GBRV may continue to undertake. While the Embassy shares Bocaranda's assessment that the GBRV does not want a war with Colombia, Chavez may want to provoke either a Colombian or U.S. action that would enable him to point more credibly to "external threats" as he continues to try to convince the region to repudiate the U.S.-Colombia Defense Cooperation Agreement and to divert Venezuelan public attention from domestic problems before the 2010 elections.
DUDDY